AMENDMENTS

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

R1

1. (Four times amended) A conjugate for distinguishing cancerous or inflamed tissue from healthy tissue comprising a fluorescent moiety and a carrier, wherein the fluorescent moiety and the carrier are bonded to one another via an ester bond, an amide bond or a Schiff base, and wherein said carrier is a protein.

R2

2. (Twice amended) The conjugate of claim 13, wherein the serum albumin is a human serum albumin.

R3

4. (Thrice amended) A conjugate for distinguishing cancerous or inflamed tissue from healthy tissue comprising a fluorescent moiety and a plurality of carriers, wherein said fluorescent moiety and said carriers are bonded to one another via an ester bond, an amide bond or a Schiff base, and wherein said carriers are proteins.

R4

8. (Three times amended) The conjugate of claim 1, wherein the fluorescent moiety comprises a porphyrin, a chlorine, a bacteriochlorine, a chlorophyll, a phthalocyanine, a carboxy cinnamic acid, a carboxyfluorescein, an acridic acid, a coumaric acid, or an indocyanine green.

9. (Thrice amended) A conjugate for distinguishing cancerous or inflamed tissue from healthy tissue comprising a plurality of fluorescent moieties and a carrier, wherein said fluorescent moieties and said carrier are bonded to one another via an ester bond, an amide bond or a Schiff base, and wherein said carrier is a protein.

10. (Thrice amended) A method of producing the conjugate of claim 1, comprising:

(a) reacting a fluorescent compound with a carrier, wherein at least one activated functional group of said fluorescent compound reacts with -OH or =NH groups of said carrier, thereby forming an amide bond, ester bond or Schiff base.